

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ADP-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 PRS-01 PM-03 OMB-01 SSO-00 CCO-00

INRE-00 RSR-01 /055 W

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O P 020030 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 722

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO CJCS

CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

COMUSSAG IMMEDIATE

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY

CG YOKOHAMA PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 3038

LIMDIS

STATE PASS AID

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CB

SUBJECT: THE CURRENT MEKONG PROBLEM

1. WITH THE ENEMY CONTROLLING (OR PERHAPS MORE
PRECISELY FANK NOT CONTROLLING) A 30 KILOMETER
CORRIDOR ON THE MEKONG BETWEEN PHNOM PENH AND
BANAM, THE CONVOY WAITING AT TAN CHAU TURNED BACK
TOWARDS VUNG TAU MARCH 30. GIVEN THE USUAL STEAMING
TIMES, THE EARLIEST IT CAN REASSEMBLE AT TAU CHAU IS
APRIL 3. THIS MESSAGE CONSIDERS FACTORS BEARING ON
HOW SOON IT MIGHT BE ABLE TO SAIL UPSTREAM AFTER
THAT.

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2. AS OF NOW THE PARAMETERS OF THE MEKONG PROBLEM
ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. IMMEDIATE ENEMY THREAT APPEARS TO BE CONCENTRATED
IN THE DEY ETH/ BANAM CORRIDOR. ENEMY FORCES OCCUPYING
POSITIONS ON BOTH BANKS OF THE RIVER APPEAR TO BE
FEW IN NUMBER. TWO KI UNITS OF REGIMENTAL STRENGTH
SUPPORTED BY SECTOR FORCES ESTIMATED AT 3-5 BATTALIONS
COULD BE INVOLVED OR IN RESERVE. TOTAL ENEMY MANPOWER
COULD THEREFORE BE SIGNIFICANT BUT ACTIVITY THUS FAR IS
NOT REPEAT NOT IMPRESSIVE. ENEMY UNITS DO HAVE A
SIGNIFICANT INDIRECT FIRE CAPABILITY.

B. DOWNSTREAM FROM DEY ETH ONLY THE DEBRIS OF THE
BASIC MEKONG GARRISON, THE TERRITORIAL COMPANIES AND
THEIR ASSIGNED ARTILLERY, REMAINS IN PLACE. OUT OF A
TOTAL OF 25 TERRITORIAL COMPANIES POSTED ON THE
RIVER, ONLY 12 REMAIN. MANY HAVE EVAPORATED;

C. THE FORCES THE FANK NOW HAS IN PLACE TO SWEEP
THE BANK ARE FOLLOWING GENERAL RESERVE UNITS; THE 38 TH
BRIGADE WITH 3 BATTALIONS ON THE LOWER RIVER WEST BANK;
THE 80 TH BRIGADE ON THE LOWER RIVER EAST BANK; THE
PARAS WITH 4 BATTALIONS OPPOSITE NEAK LOEUNG, AND
SIX BATTALIONS OF THE FIRST DIVISION AT AND OPPOSITE DEY
ETH.

D. HOWEVER, NONE OF THESE GENERAL RESERVE UNITS HAS
GOOD FIGHTING SPIRIT. UNITS OF THE PARAS HAVE ON AT LEAST
TWO OCCASIONS IN THE LAST MONTH TRIED TO WALK OUT TOWARDS
PHNOM PENH; AND TWO BATTALIONS OF THE FIRST DIVISION BROKE
AND RAN BEFORE AN ENEMY AFB MARCH 30 AND HAD TO BE
ROUNDED UP BY FORCE. ALTHOUGH THE REPLACEMENT OF BRIG
GEN SREY YAR BY LT COL UM PRASITH AT THE HEAD OF THE
PARAS SHOULD IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE, THERE IS A VERY
SERIOUS QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ANY OF THESE UNITS IS
CAPABLE OF MOVING FORWARD PURPOSEFULLY IN THE FACE OF
HOSTILE FIRE.

E. FANK IS COMMITTING OR BELIEVES IT CAN COMMIT ONE
OR TWO MORE BRIGADES (THE SECOND BRIGADE OF THE SECOND
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DIVISION, AUGMENTED BY AN APC TROOP, AND POSSIBLY THE

51 ST BRIGADE OF THE THIRD DIVISION). NEITHER OF THESE UNITS HAS GREAT PUNCH, AND BOTH ARE WELL UNDERSTRENGTH, BUT THEY ARE SUPERIOR TO THE MANEUVER UNITS NOW ASSIGNED. BEYOND THEM, FANK COFS MAJ GEN SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ AND CHIEF OF OPERATIONS MAJ GEN HOU HANG SIN BELIEVE THAT THEY QTE HAVE NO MORE RESERVES UNQTE , I. E., THAT THEY COULD NOT AUGMENT THE MEKONG FORCE WITHOUT EXPOSING THEMSELVES TO TERRITORIAL LOSS ELSEWHERE.

F. AS OF APRIL 1 PHNOM PENH CIVILIAN STOCKS AMOUNT TO:

MOGAS	4.2 DAYS
AUTOMOTIVE DIESEL	3.3 DAYS
POWER PLANT (DIESEL)	5.6 DAYS
POWER PLANT (FUEL)	54.8 DAYS
INDUSTRIAL DIESE L	5.6 DAYS
JP- 4	6.1 DAYS
JP-1	57 . 0
AVGAS 100/13 0	24.4 DAYS
AVGAS 115/145	24.0 DAYS
AND MILITARY STOCKS TO:	
MOGASS HM	6.3 DAYS
AUTOMOTIVE DIESEL	5.2 DAYS
AVGAS	7.2 DAYS
JP- 4	11.1 DAYS

G. WE SHOULD ALSO ALLOW FOR PRIVATELY HELD AND UNREPORTED STOCKS. THUS UNLESS THE RIVER IS OPENED AND UNLESS STRINGENT RATIONING IS IMPOSED, A ROLLING PETROLEUM CRISIS WILL START ON OR ABOUT THE FIRST WEEK IN APRIL BEGINNING WITH MOGAS. WITH PRESENT TENSIONS SUCH A CRISIS, AND PARTICULARLY THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE MEKONG BEING CLOSED, COULD HAVE IMPORTANT POLITICAL EFFECTS.

H. VILLAGE CATHOLIQUE SUPPLIES ABOUT TWO- THIRDS OF THE CITY' S ELECTRIC POWER AND ITS DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IS NOT INTERCONNECTED WITH THAT OF THE OTHER PLANT AT CHAK ANGOR. THUS THE FACT THAT CHAK ANGOR WILL BE ABLE TO OPERATE SATISFACTORILY FOR SOME TIME WILL NOT BE OF ANY USE TO A GREAT PART OF THE CITY SHOULD VILLAGE CATHOLIQUE BE FORCED TO SHUT DOWN FOR LACK OF FUEL.

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I. THE GKR IS INTRODUCING A SYSTEM OF RATIONING FOR BOTH MOGAS AND AUTOMOTIVE DIESEL. EACH VEHICLE WILL BE ALLOWED A TOTAL OF 12 LITRES OF FUEL. ON MONDAY, APRIL 2 THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE IS CONVOKING A MEETING OF THE

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ADP-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 PRS-01 PM-03 OMB-01 SSO-00 CCO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 723

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CINCPAC CP SMITH IMMEDIATE

COMUSSAG IMMEDIATE

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK PRIORITY 4343

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

AMCONGEN HONG KONG PRIORITY

CG YOKOHAMA PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 3038

LIMDIS

OIL COMPANIES TO REVIEW DISTRIBUTION OF REMAINING POL
STOCKS AND EXAMINE THE POSSIBILITIES OF TRUCKING POL FROM KOMPONGSH

AND THE THAI BORDER. HOWEVER THE MINISTRY IS NOT OPTIMISTIC
OF THE POTENTIAL OF ROAD TRANSPORT SINCE THERE ARE ONLY ABOUT 50 -
60 TANK TRUCKS IN COUNTRY.

3. WE ARE DEPLOYING MAXIMUM AIR SUPPORT CONSISTENT WITH THE ROE.
MAJ GEN HOU HANG SIN THINKS CLEARING OPERATION WILL TAKE ABOUT A
WEEK, QTE IF WE DON' T RUN INTO TROUBLE UNQTE. THAT WOULD PUT
CONVOY ETA IN PHNOM PENH TO APRIL 6 AT THE EARLIEST OR JUST BEFORE
THE FIRST POL RUPTURE POINT.

4. BUT RECENTLY, FANK UNITS HAVE REGULARLY BEEN RUNNING INTO
TROUBLE. WE HAVE THUS:

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A. URGED THE GKR AND FANK TO INSTITUTE PETROLEUM RATIONING.

B. STARTED TO TAKE A HARD LOOK AT THE QTE NO RESERVES UNQTE PROBLEM, AND WHETHER FANK CAN BE SPEEDED UP.

C. BEGUN TO CONSIDER WHAT AREA SHOULD BE LEFT EXPOSED IF CURRENT OPERATIONS DON' T GET OFF THE GROUND, AND A GENERAL RESERVE UNIT HAS TO BE PULLED FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE TO OPEN THE RIVER. WE NOTE THAT NO RPT NO FANK ACTIONS CAN BE EXPECTED DURING THE KHMER NEW YEAR APRIL 12/14. THE RIVER MUST BE OPENED BY THEN, IF A SERIOUS SUPPLY CRISIS IS TO BE AVOIDED.

D. CONTINUE CURRENT AMMO AIRLIFT (SIX TO TEN C-130 SORTIES PER DAY), AND CONSIDER POSSIBLE MILITARY POL AIRLIFT FOR MINIMUM ESSENTIAL CONSUMPTION REQUIREMENTS WHILE WARNING THE KHMER THAT CURRENT ASSETS ARE NOT RPT NOT AVAILABLE FOR ANY SUBSTANTIAL EFFORT TO SUPPLY PHNOM PENH BY AIR.

5. SOONER OR LATER THE MEKONG CAN AND WILL BE OPENED. BUT THE LONGER RANGE AND POSSIBLY VERY SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF GARRISONING IT WILL REMAIN. SOSTHENE IS NOT SANGUINE THAT MUCH CAN BE SALVAGED OF THE TERRITORIALS. FANK' S CURRENT PLAN IS TO USE THE THREE MNK NAVAL INFANTRY BATTALIONS, REPLACING THEM WITH THE REMAINS OF ARMY BATTALIONS DISSOLVED IN THE CURRENT FORCE LEVEL EXERCISE, THEMSELVES TO BE RECYCLED AND DEPLOYED ALONG THE RIVER. BUT THE PROCESS WILL BE SLOW: MNK HAS ONLY 12 COMPANIES OF NAVAL INFANTRY, AT LEAST 25 ARE NEEDED. THUS THE PROBABILITY IS THAT A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE GENERAL RESERVE WILL BE PINNED DOWN IN FIXED POSITIONS ON THE MEKONG, WRFD# A CONSEQUENT DETERIORATION IN FANK' S MOBILITY AND STRATEGIC POSITION.

6. THE DISPARATE COMMAND STRUCTURE ON THE MEKONG REMAINS A PROBLEM. EVENTUALLY MNK COMMODORE VONG SARENDY WILL TAKE OVER ENTIRE CONTROL. BUT FOR THIS CRISIS, MAJ GEN HOU HANG SIN WILL EXERCISE DIRECT COMMAND.

7. WE SHALL SHORTLY KNOW HOW SERIOUS THE PROBLEM REALLY IS. MEANWHILE, TWO CONCLUSIONS ARE ALREADY APPARENT. FIRST, THE DIFFICULTY IS NOT SO MUCH ENEMY STRENGTH, BUT FANK' S WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT. THIS WE BELIEVE STEMS IN PART FROM THE WORSENING POLITICAL SITUATION. THE GENERAL MALAISE THAT HAS IMPARTED ON CIVILIAN MORALE HAS ALSO AFFECTED FANK. SECOND, THE
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ENEMY IS SUCCEEDING OR HAS SUCCEEDED IN GETTING FANK TO COMMIT
ALL HIS FORCES, THUS BRINGING THE MILITARY SITUATION TO A CRITICAL
POINT. WE BELIEVE THE ENEMY FORCES ARE ALSO FULLY COMMITTED.
SWANK

NOTE BY OCT: # AS RECEIVED, WILL SERVICE UPON REQUEST.

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*** Current Classification *** SECRET

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